

Love. It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru.



The Philadelphia Inquirer

philly.com

Home Inquirer Daily News News Business Sports Entertainment Living Restaurants & Food

Jobs Cars Homes Marketplace

News | Front Page | Sports | Business | Obituaries | Arts & Entertainment | Food, Home & Life | Health & Science | Education | Opinion | Blogs & Columns

Subscriber Services | The e-Inquirer

search

CURRENTS



email print font size

Posted on Sun, Aug. 8, 2010

COMMENTARY

## To fallen envoys of hope in Iraq

By Tom Manion

As we walked up the tarmac at the Baghdad airport, I began to think about the significance of my trip to Iraq and the country's future. It was 3 a.m. May 25, and we had just finished a two-week whirlwind visit to the country where my son Travis gave his life defending freedom.

We had met with Iraqi army soldiers who had served side by side with Travis and went to places like Fallujah where he had fought. I'm not sure I got all the answers I was looking for, but it was a healing process that allowed me to better understand his sacrifice.

This was the political backdrop as Travis was deploying for his second tour of Iraq in 2006: It was a war that shouldn't have been, brought about by the search for weapons of mass destruction that were never found. The neocons had fabricated this myth so they could mount their revenge against Saddam Hussein.

Nothing is harder than having a loved one in harm's way, where lives are being lost, and having to listen to politicians back home second-guessing our commitment to the mission. It's easy for some to treat these conflicts as abstract, but it's a different story when you have a personal investment in the outcome. Our military families are constantly under the impatient eye of the American psyche, never knowing whether their sacrifices will be in vain.

For Travis, it wasn't about whether we should have been there; it was about helping the Iraqi people fight for their country and its freedom and making the world a better place. And so he went, with his fellow countrymen, with the purest of intentions to help change the tide of evil in the critical battleground of Al Anbar province.

What would Travis think now, three years after giving his life for this effort that has faded quietly away for so many Americans? I know what some Iraqis think.

Col. Ali Jafar Muhye, who had named a military base in my son's memory, said to me, "You lose your son, I lose my friend. . . . America is one of the greatest countries in the world, and they offer freedom to other people to live a better life.

"The U.S. military volunteered and came to liberate Iraq, and they sacrificed much. . . . They helped the Iraqi people gain their freedom. . . . God willing, freedom will prevail. . . . The elections are proof of freedom and the country moving in the right direction."

With everyone we met, you could sense the weariness of the struggle, but also the optimism for the future. None was without personal sacrifice. Some had lost several family members. But they pressed forward with the hope.

One Iraqi I met in Baghdad said to me, "We suffered 30 years under the old regime . . . oppression and war after war with no progress for our people. . . . The best thing to happen for Iraq was the liberation. . . . Your son gave his life for a greater cause."

We left Forward Operating Base Manion, near Fallujah, and headed for a school in Musayyib that had been adopted by Lt. Colby Umbrell, an Army Ranger from Doylestown who gave his life five days after Travis. On his last leave home, Colby had been collecting school supplies for these Iraqi children.

After Colby's death, the Army continued his work, providing the school with a new computer lab, some paint, and other maintenance. The children's energy, happiness, and budding life are undeniable, though the stark environment - broken windows and peeling paint - reminded us there was more to be done. But Colby made a difference. The children he fought and died for move forward with tremendous optimism.



LT. COL. JOEL POUDRIER, USMC Retired Marine Col. Tom Manion (center), in Iraq where son Travis died, met with many Iraqis, including Col. Khalid Sakran Jabr Hindi al-Ma'amouri (left), with interpreter Naji Chammout.

1 of 2 View images



Advertise Here

Today's Most Viewed Most Emailed

### MOST VIEWED IN THIS SECTION

- [Annul Haiti's elections and have free, fair vote](#)
- [Head Strong: God doesn't pay attention to the game](#)
- [The case against legalizing marijuana in California](#)
- ['That awful night' that changed everything](#)
- [Founders a model to all on freedom of religion](#)

### LATEST STORIES IN THIS SECTION

- [Letters: A vote against Evans was vote against the city](#) 12/05/2010
- [Ringside: Don't trust public officials? Why not?](#) 12/05/2010 By Paul Davies
- [Letters to the Editor](#) 12/05/2010
- [Inquirer Editorial: Put politics aside](#) 12/05/2010
- [Inquirer Editorial: Tough love for Camden](#) 12/05/2010

Top Jobs Top Homes Top Cars

### INQUIRER & DAILY NEWS MERCHANDISE



Buy Inquirer, Daily News, and Philly merchandise:

- [Photos & Page Reprints](#)
- [Autographs from History](#)
- [Sports Collectibles](#)
- [Music Collectibles](#)
- [Signe Cartoons](#)
- [More](#)

Lance Cpl. Danny Purcell served with our son and wrote us weeks after losing him: "Lt. Travis Manion believed in this mission and believed he could make a difference, as do the rest of us. He believed it was worth his life, and it is worth mine as well. We earned our freedom, by blood, sweat, and tears, and there is no greater gift that we can give to the world than to make them free as well."

Unlike Travis and Colby, Danny made it safely home, but he and all the others who have sacrificed so much can now look back with pride that they have created a beacon of freedom in Iraq. Struggles remain - the Iraqis have still not formed a government from the March elections. But our ambassadors of freedom have confronted evil and created the possibility for the Iraqis to live a better life.

When Travis was asked why he had to go for his second tour, he said simply, "If not me, then who?" We can all learn a lot by better understanding the selflessness and sacrifice of these courageous Americans. We're fortunate that our country and the world have these brave men and women who continue to step forward to defend freedom.

My short trip to Iraq gave me some insight into the struggles, hopes, and dreams of the Iraqi people. And it made me better understand this ray of light that we've created for Iraq and the world.

Approaching the C-17 on the tarmac, I couldn't help but notice the flag-draped coffins in the plane. I sat directly beside them, thinking how my son had made this same trip home to his final resting place. There was complete reverence and silence from all the military passengers and crew. At 5 a.m., when we arrived at our destination, we formed outside the plane and rendered a final salute.

It was a tough experience, one that hit too close to home. But I felt there was a message there for all of us: The sacrifice continues, maybe not in the headlines, but certainly for the military families that ask for so little, yet give so much for freedom.

---

Tom Manion is a Gold Star father, retired Marine colonel, and board member of the Travis Manion Foundation ([www.travismanion.com](http://www.travismanion.com)). E-mail him at [tom@travismanion.com](mailto:tom@travismanion.com).

**KICK BREAST CANCER NOW**  
with TEAM RA-RAS.



SUSAN G.  
KOMEN  
FOR THE  
CURE  
PHILADELPHIA

#### TICKET OFFERS

#### SPORTS OTHER PHILLY TIX

- Phillies
- Usher
- Eagles
- Michael Buble
- Flyers
- Earth, Wind & Fire
- Union
- Kevin Hart

PHILLY.COM: [News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [What's Happening](#) | [Restaurants & Food](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Living](#) | [Marketplace](#) | [Jobs](#)

SITE SERVICES: [Advertise on Philly.com](#) | [View print ads and special sections](#) | [Mobile Edition](#) | [The e-Inquirer](#) | [News In Education](#)

THE INQUIRER: [News](#) | [Front Page](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Arts & Entertainment](#) | [Food, Home & Life](#) | [Health & Science](#) | [Education](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Blogs & Columns](#) | [Subscriber Services](#)

DAILY NEWS: [City & Local](#) | [Sports](#) | [Yo! Features](#) | [Columnists](#) | [Daily News Opinion](#) | [Photos](#) | [Multimedia](#) | [National News](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Subscriber Services](#)

CLASSIFIEDS: [Jobs](#) | [Cars on AutoTrader.com](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Rentals](#) | [Marketplace](#) | [Celebrations](#)

PARTNERS: [Phrequency](#) | [The Trend](#) | [Active Adult Housing](#) | [Homes and Living](#) | [Communities Magazine](#) | [Employment Weekly](#) | [Taste of Philadelphia](#) | [Parade Magazine](#)

[About Philly.com](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms of Use & Privacy Statement](#) | [Copyright 2010](#)  
Latest News Feed  [RSS](#)  [MY YAHOO!](#) All RSS Feeds [RSS Terms of Use](#)